

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

Ambassador McKee's Interview with NBC Popondetta, Radio Northern Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Radio Northern NBC: Hello listeners of NBC Northern, joining me at NBC Northern studios, we have our special guest who is the ambassador for USA, her excellence Ms. Erin McKee, she's the Ambassador to PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. I believe she visited our province last year and this is the second time around to visit our province and we are happy to have her in our province and we thought better for Mrs. McKee, tell us why you are here for the second time to visit our province.

Ambassador McKee: Thank you very much and a good morning, and I appreciate your taking the time to have a conversation with me. I, off the top of my head, I would say the first time wasn't enough, and I promised both your governor and your people here in Oro province, Northern province, that the United States is very keen to expand our partnership and our work throughout Papua New Guinea and, particularly in Oro province. There are great opportunities to deepen that partnership. First and foremost, in alignment with my president's priorities are the issues of climate change and the rich natural resources that we see here in Oro province are fundamental to preserve, protect, and sustain, so that they exist for generations to come and can contribute to reducing the climate crisis and overcoming the climate crisis around the world. So, Oro province and through the initiatives of the provincial government is looking at conservation and natural resource management. And that is something that the United States admires and champions and wants to support.

Second of all, in addition to climate change is at the heart of what the United States stands for as the world's oldest democracy. And that is good governance and anti-corruption, and we believe deeply in the restoration of democracy around the world and ensuring that those initiatives to enhance good governance, transparency, accountability, and stop corruption are critical to the stability of the planet and the restoration of democracy. In many countries first and foremost, with Papua New Guinea, our partner here. And so, for those two primary reasons, I am revisiting to see what progress has been made since my last visit and see what additional opportunities there might be for partnership with the United States.

Radio Northern NBC: Speaking of the conservation that you touched a bit on, Mrs. McKee talking about conservation, how important is it for the globe?

Ambassador McKee: So, I think I did touch on that initially, but it is important for the future of our planet. We have been given a great responsibility to protect and preserve the treasures and the resources of the earth. That doesn't mean that we have to sacrifice livelihoods as well. And we've learned in the 21st century that with conservation and sustainable resource management, whether it's maritime and fishing forever or terrestrial, and making sure that our forests continue to grow, and non-timber forest products are sustainably harvested, used, and restored, so that their use can continue into the future, is critical for both the economy as well as the climate. And so, for every country to act

together is how we're going to tackle the crisis in the future, well actually today, to solve the crisis for the future. Papua New Guinea is one of the greatest biodiversity sources and spots on the planet.

Water is also an important resource. We're hearing a little bit of dripping there. And to ensure that those resources are well-managed and continue to contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preserving carbon, Papua New Guinea has a lot to offer to the world. So, while it's important to this country and its future economic prosperity, it's also important to the planet to do that smartly because as your Prime Minister has said, Papua New Guinea is the lungs of the world. And we need to make sure that the world can keep breathing.

Radio Northern NBC: Going to the conservation again, I believe it's your second visit you will be in the Managalas conservation area after this, this interview. How is the US government going to assist in conservation project, especially within the Managalas area in Oro province.

Ambassador McKee: So that is a great question. We launched last year a flagship biodiversity program called Lukautim Graun, which is focused primarily in the Bismarck corridor, but also touches on Oro province. And that effort is being expanded through a new landscapes activity, also terrestrial, that is on land, to be able to work on advancing efforts by both provincial and national government for conservation areas and helping work with the people and the communities to understand that conservation does not equate to a reduction in their livelihood. This goes back to the natural resource management and governance push so that we can have sustained and growing livelihoods while preserving the basis upon which those livelihoods depend. That is what conservation, smart conservation, and natural resource management mean in the 21st century, and we look forward to being able to expand the project here in Oro province and support the efforts of the provincial government, as well as the national government's intent to really, make a big push in the run-up to COP 26, which is this year, and into the future to ensure that Papua New Guinea's natural resources are sustained and preserved.

Radio Northern NBC: First of all, thanks to the United States government, especially in supporting in our country in terms of basic services, like education and health and others, and also in the relationship. The US government strengthened in terms of, such vital services like I mentioned. Also, some of the goals of your visit to the country, and also for us in Oro province, like you mentioned, can you talk more about the natural landscape management, natural resource and also in the space in maritime issues?

Ambassador McKee: So of course, while right now our two biggest bilateral programs are focused on land, as we like to say, terrestrial. Papua New Guinea has rich maritime resources. And we had the great honor to launch the national oceans policy last year with the then Deputy Prime Minister. And what I found inspiring about that policy, and that I shared back with headquarters in Washington is that it wasn't just about conservation. It was about natural resources. What I like to call fish forever, but also, the entire spectrum of a maritime policy, which includes security and law enforcement.

And that means to stop the illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. People who are stealing resources from your waters. And that's a security and sort of a law enforcement issue as well as a conservation issue to make sure that the fishing livelihoods and ultimately processing and other opportunities from the maritime space and maritime economy can continue to deliver great dividends for Papua New Guinea today and in the future.

And so, hand in glove, the national oceans policy, that Papua New Guinea independently and on its own developed, is strategically sound because it covers that entire spectrum. So the United States is very keen to launch an additional program that will focus on, yes, the biodiversity and conservation part, but in particular, the security side, and we have pending and still under negotiations, a ship rider agreement with your government to be able to enhance the capability of Papua New Guinea to patrol its ease, EDZ and stop those IUU, fishers and other transnational criminals who use the waters as their highways for theft. In addition to building up the law enforcement and other capabilities so that the prosecution of those criminals is publicly seen and that people believe in the importance of not just preserving, but protecting this rich resource.

And so the US is very excited to hopefully bring to conclusion those negotiations for that agreement so we can expand that capability as well as, as I said, a roll out a program on the maritime and biodiversity space as well. So stay tuned. I don't have anything to announce today. But we are making progress.

Radio Northern NBC: Just one from me. How we are the conservation and biodiversity projects that you mentioned will benefit the PNG government and US government.

Ambassador McKee: So the United States is stronger when it's friends and partners are stronger and we see that that sustained livelihood and the ability to protect those resources for all the reasons I mentioned, which are critical for Papua New Guinea, means that they're critical for the United States.

We are a Pacific nation of as well, and we see the Pacific as an important and vital neighbor. And where Papua New Guinea is prosperous, stable, successful, and grows in maturity as a democracy, we see that that partnership only becomes stronger. "Strengthen in diversity," is your national motto. Our national motto is, "E pluribus Unum," which is, "out of many one," and the United States embraces that and everywhere that we can want to see democracies flourish and thrive. And they can only do that if they have a sound economic base and are able to exercise their sovereignty in market diversification, who they do business with, how they do business, and how they preserve the basis of that business for the future transparently and responsibly.

And so that investment from the United States as an investment in both of our futures.

Radio Northern NBC: To wrap things up, if our governor has something to it, we can give him this opportunity to at least say something before we wrap up things.

Governor Juffa: Thank you very much, NBC, for having us here. And thank you, Ambassador McKee for again visiting our humble small province. We are always happy to receive you here anytime. You and your family and your team are always welcome here. Whenever you feel like coming here, just let us know and we'll see what we can do to make your stay a memorable stay. We will continue to partner with the US government in Australian government and New Zealand government, and indeed any government that wishes to come and assist us. We are happy to work with them. We have a long history, especially with the aforementioned governments because of our common history that we share from World War II and also the assistance that has been rendered to our province.

I want to thank you ambassador for always taking time to, you know, demonstrate your concern and the concern of your government for our province. And welcome to Oro again, we will be going to the Managalas conservation area. And this is just the beginning of an amazing journey that we will continue together in partnership with the people of the United States. Thank you.

Radio Northern NBC: Your excellency. At anything last few words to say before we wrap up?

Ambassador McKee: I would just like to say return the thanks to the governor for the warm hospitality. I always learn so much every time I get out of Port Moresby and see the true Papua New Guinea, which is represented here in your province, by your people, by your beautiful mountains and your pristine ocean.

And my commitment to you and the people of Northern province, Oro province, is that the United States is not going anywhere. And this is the first of what will be many visits to be able to deepen that partnership and demonstrate our commitment to our shared future, which is one of economic prosperity, security, and freedom. And that is something that I know we all believe in. So thank you for your time today.